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Mexico City, March 27 (RHC)-- Mexico has surpassed 200,000 test-confirmed deaths from COVID-19, as President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador called vaccination efforts a race against time.

The Mexican president prepared to deploy more military, state and local personnel to spur the vaccination effort as more doses arrive, including a shipment of 1.7 million AstraZeneca shots the United States has “loaned” to Mexico.

Mexico’s total 200,211 confirmed COVID-19 deaths announced on Thursday trail only the United States and Brazil, countries with larger populations. The real death toll is believed to be drawing closer to 300,000, due to the country’s extremely low rate of testing.

“I think it is more. I think, for example, that the numbers on the news are not correct. I think it is higher,” funeral home worker Benigno Clemente Zarate said of the death toll. Zarate told The Associated Press he has tended to multiple deaths in a single household. “We have had some jobs where two or three people have died in the same household, in the same family,” he said.

The Mexican government stopped publishing numbers on excess deaths at the end of 2020. The last time the numbers were reported was at the start of January, before the worst of the second wave of deaths hit.

But authorities in Mexico City have published excess death figures through the end of February, and they show that January’s deaths were almost 46 percent higher than in the city’s first wave in June.

Mexico’s health department acknowledges almost 220,000 “estimated” COVID-19 deaths as of mid-March, but that estimate is not based on excess death reports and probably does not include the considerable number of people who die at home in Mexico.

Mexico City was among the hardest-hit cities in the world. Mexico City’s nine million inhabitants suffered 38,627 deaths; with only 7.1 percent of the country’s population, the capital has had 19.3 percent of the country’s total deaths.

While large, closely packed cities with intensive mass transit systems may have suffered more across the globe, Mexico City also has far better healthcare facilities than the rest of the country. Still, the capital saw about 430 confirmed COVID-19 deaths per 100,000.

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